

Duluth Public Schools Check and Connect Program Update May 2024

Sarah Laulunen, LICSW
Check & Connect Coordinator

The Evolution of Check & Connect in the Duluth Public Schools

What is it?

Check & Connect is an intervention used with students who show **warning signs of disengagement** with school and who are **at risk of dropping out**.

- Check - Mentors **systematically monitor student performance** (e.g., absences, tardies, behavioral, grades)
- Connect - Mentors provide **personalized, timely interventions** to help students solve problems, build skills, and enhance competence. Mentors work students and families for **at least two years**, functioning as liaisons between home and school and **strive to build constructive family-school relationships**. See the [Components and Elements of Check & Connect](#).

How It Started

US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) charged states to develop a multi-year plan that would improve high school graduation rates for Black and/or American Indian and youth with disabilities.

- In 2015, the Minnesota Department of Education identified Duluth Public Schools as one of four districts that accounted for approximately 30% of the population group
- MDE partnered with districts to implement an evidence-based practice to impact graduation rates
- According to the U.S. Department of Education's [What Works Clearinghouse](#), Check & Connect **is the only program** found to have strong evidence of positive effects on staying in school.

Where We've Been

- Started slow and small, focused on building internal capacity. See: [District Capacity Assessment Results Over Time](#)
- Improved graduation rates of Black and American Indian students with disabilities. See [Graduation Rates Over Time](#)
- Wrapped up initial grant in Spring 2021, sought external funding, and began planning for expansion
 - Were [awarded \\$1.6 million](#) to add mentors to each secondary school; later obtained additional funding to add a position at ALC and to expand data use
 - Modified mentor job description to better align with heightened post-pandemic student needs

Where We Are

Students Enrolled



Total Schools



Total Mentors



Average Caseload



Average Weekly
Minutes ?



Program Impact

Decrease in Absences ?

46% or 101 of 219 

Decrease in Suspensions ?

38% or 11 of 29 

Where We Are Going

- Continue to increase the percentage of historically underserved students receiving a Check & Connect mentor

Student Group	Receiving Check & Connect 23-24	Receiving Check & Connect 22-23	Enrollment in District
Students of color	52.1%	39.2%	22.5%
Students receiving special education services	15.7%	21.3%	20.7%
Students receiving free or reduced price meals	57.8%	64.1%	43%

- Provide Check & Connect training and support to other staff across the district .

Where We Are Going

- Utilize 2 more years of partial funding from SLC to continue programming.
- Continue the things that are working, such as:
 - Partnering closely with MDE staff
 - Providing ongoing professional development and support to mentors
 - Delivering the evidence-based practice with fidelity
- Transition away from district-driven leadership by continuing to building capacity at school-level
- Provide additional training and support on using data to identify students, monitor progress, exit students

Student & Family Testimonials

Additional Data

District Capacity Assessment Results Over Time

